

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN XIV. 18-20.

18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. | ye shall live also.
19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, | 20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

THE short passage before us is singularly rich in “precious promises.” Twice our Lord Jesus Christ says, “I will.” Twice He says to believers, “Ye shall.”

We learn from this passage, that *Christ's second coming is meant to be the special comfort of believers*. He says to His disciples, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”

Now what is the “coming” here spoken of? It is only fair to say that this is a disputed point among Christians. Many refer it to our Lord’s coming to His disciples after His resurrection. Many refer it to His invisible coming into the hearts of His people by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Many refer it to His coming by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. It may well be doubted, however, whether any one of these three views conveys the full meaning of our Lord’s words, “I will come.”

The true sense of the expression appears to be the second personal coming of Christ at the end of the world. It is a wide, broad, sweeping promise, intended for all believers, in every age, and not for the Apostles alone: I will not stay always in heaven: I will one day come back to you.” It is like the message which the angels brought to the disciples after the ascension: “This same Jesus shall come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.” (Acts. i. 11.) It is like the last promise which winds up the Book of Revelation: “Surely I come quickly.” (Rev. xxii. 20.) Just in the same way the parting consolation held out to believers, the night before the crucifixion, is a personal return: “I will come to you.”

Let us settle it in our minds that all believers are comparatively “orphans,” and children in their minority, until the second advent. Our best things are yet to come. Faith has yet to be exchanged for sight, and hope for certainty. Our peace and joy are at present very imperfect. They are as nothing to what we shall have when Christ returns. For the return let us look and long and pray. Let us place it in the forefront of all our doctrinal system, next to the atoning death and the interceding life of our Lord. The highest style of Christians are the men who look for and love the Lord’s appealing. (2 Tim. iv. 8.)

We learn for another thing, that *Christ's life secures the life of His believing people*. He says, “Because I live ye shall live also.”

There is a mysterious and indissoluble union between Christ and every true Christian. The man that is once joined to Him by faith, is as closely united as a member of the body is united to the head. So long as Christ, his

Head, lives, so long he will live. He cannot die unless Christ can be plucked from heaven, and Christ's life destroyed. But this, since Christ is very God, is totally impossible! "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over Him." (Rom. vi. 9.) That which is divine, in the very nature of things, cannot die.

Christ's life secures the continuance of *spiritual life* to His people. They shall not fall away. They shall persevere unto the end. The divine nature of which they are partakers, shall not perish. The incorruptible seed within them shall not be destroyed by the devil and the world. Weak as they are in themselves, they are closely knit to an immortal Head, and not one member of His mystical body shall ever perish.

Christ's life secures the *resurrection life* of His people. Just as He rose again from the grave, because death could not hold Him one moment beyond the appointed time, so shall all His believing members rise again in the day when He calls them from the tomb. The victory that Jesus won when He rolled the stone away, and came forth from the tomb, was a victory not only for Himself, but for His people. If the Head rose, much more shall the members.

Truths like these ought to be often pondered by true Christians. The careless world knows little of a believer's privileges. It sees little but the outside of him. It does not understand the secret of his present strength, and of his strong hope of good things to come. And what is that secret? Invisible union with an invisible Saviour in heaven! Each child of God is invisibly linked to the throne of the Rock of Ages. When that throne can be shaken, and not till then, we may despair. But Christ lives, and we shall live also.

We learn, finally, from this passage, that *full and perfect knowledge of divine things will never be attained by believers until the second advent*. Our Lord says, "At that day," the day of my coming, "ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you."

The best of saints knows but little so long as he is in the body. The fall of our father Adam has corrupted our understandings, as well as our consciences, hearts, and wills. Even after conversion we see through a glass darkly, and on no point do we see so dimly as on the nature of our own union with Christ, and of the union of Christ and the Father. These are matters in which we must be content to believe humbly, and, like little children, to receive on trust the things which we cannot explain.

But it is a blessed and cheering thought that when Christ comes again, the remains of ignorance shall be rolled away. Raised from the dead, freed from the darkness of this world, no longer tempted by the devil and tried by the flesh, believers shall see as they have been seen, and know as they have been known. We shall have light enough one day. What we know not now, we shall know hereafter.

Let us rest our souls on this comfortable thought, when we see the mournful divisions which rend the Church of Christ. Let us remember that a large portion of them arise from ignorance. We know in part, and therefore misunderstand one another. A day comes when Lutherans shall no longer wrangle with Zwinglians, nor Calvinist with Arminian, nor Churchman with Dissenter. That day is the day of Christ's second coming. Then and then only will the promise receive its complete fulfilment,—“At that day ye shall know.”

NOTES. JOHN XIV. 18-20.

18.—[*I will not leave you comfortless.*] The word we render “comfortless,” means literally “orphans,” and is so translated in the marginal reading of the English version. It beautifully describes the helpless, solitary, friendless state, by comparison, in which the disciples of Christ were left, when He died and was withdrawn from their bodily eyes. “In that condition,” says Jesus, “I will not leave you. You shall not always be orphans.” It adds to the beauty of the expression to remember that He had already called them “little children” hence there was a special fitness in the word “orphans.”

[*I will come to you.*] The verb here is in the present tense “I do come.” About the meaning of the sentence there is much difference of opinion. Even the Fathers, as Sargon says, “explain the words diversely.” There is no more unanimity, we must remember, among the Fathers than among modern divines. The “consent of Catholic antiquity,” about which many make so much ado, is more imaginary than real.

Some think, as Chrysostom, that the “coming” means only the reappearing of Christ after His resurrection from the grave on the third day.

Others think, as Hutcheson, that our Lord only means His coming by His Spirit, as a pledge of his presence.

Others think, as Augustine and Bede, that our Lord looks far forward to His second coming at the end of the world, and speaks the words to the whole company of believers in every age: “I am coming again. I come quickly.”

I decidedly prefer this last view. The first and second seem to me to cramp, narrow, and confine our Lord's promise. The last is in harmony with all His teaching. The second advent is the great hope of the Church. In the last chapter of the Bible, the Greek for “I come quickly,” is precisely the same verb that is used here. (Rev. xxii. 20.)

In saying this I would not be mistaken. I admit fully that Jesus came to His Church after His ascension, invisibly, does come to His Church continually, is with His Church even to the end of the world. But I do not think this is the meaning of the text.

19.—[*Yet a little while...ye see Me.*] Again the meaning of our Lord is somewhat obscure. I think He must mean, “Very shortly the wicked unbelieving world will no longer behold and gaze on Me, as I shall be withdrawn from it, and ascend into heaven. But even then ye see Me, and will continue seeing Me with the eyes of faith.” I cannot think that the present tense here, “Ye behold Me,” can apply to the second advent. It must surely refer to the spiritual vision of Christ which believers would enjoy. The world could not prevent them seeing Him. The Greek word for “ye see” implies a fixed, steady, habitual gaze.

Bishop Hall says, “Ye by the eye of faith shall see and acknowledge Me.”

[*Because I live, ye shall live also.*] This great deep saying of Christ seems to admit of a very wide and full signification “Your spiritual life now, and your eternal life hereafter, are both secured by my life. The life of the Head guarantees the life of the members. I live,

have life in myself, can never die, can never have my life destroyed by my enemies, and live on to all eternity. Therefore ye shall live also. Your life is secured for you, and can never be destroyed, You have everlasting life now, and shall have everlasting glory hereafter."

That word "I live," is a great full saying, and we cannot fathom it all. It does not merely mean "I shall rise from the dead." It is certainly far more than the future tense. It implies that Christ is "the Living One," the source and fountain of life. It is like "In Him was life,"—and "as the Father hath life in Himself, even so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself." (John i. 4; v. 26.)

20.—[*On that day ye shall know, etc.*] Here, again, I believe, with Cyril and Augustine, that our Lord specially refers to the day of His own second advent. Then, and not till then, His disciples will have perfect knowledge. Now they see and know in part, and through a glass darkly. Then they shall fully understand the mystical union between the Father and Son, and between the Son and all His believing members.

To confine the "day," as Chrysostom does, to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, seems to me to fall short of its full meaning.